

Evangelia Kindinger, *Homebound: Diaspora Spaces and Selves in Greek American Return Narratives*. American Studies Monograph Series 257. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag WINTER, 2015. 223 pages. ISBN: 978-3-8253-6421-2.

The title of this volume indicates an oxymoron that permeates the critical perambulations of the author. On the one hand, diasporic identity, as defined by Kindinger (a Greek-German herself), is revealed as a cause for, and source of, a stressful yet empowering creative *destabilization* of “essentialist and static notions of home, nation and identity” (18).¹ On the other hand, this identity seems equally predicated upon a kind of mysterious *binding* of the diasporic self with a past or culture s/he may not have even experienced directly. Put in Lacanian terms, the veiling of that “ancestral” culture by time and distance appears to be precisely what engenders, first, a *méconnaissance* of cultural identification that leads to the desire for the (re-)acquisition of something unattainable (that was never there to begin with). And when that culture is none other than “the glory that was Greece,” the myth-implicated master-signifier for the Occident (21), it maximizes this impossible nostalgia and its *jouissance* deficit. As Kindinger says, “[t]hese divergences ... are the moments when the creative potential of homecoming is revealed” (17).

A notable virtue of *Homebound* is, first, its solid and meticulous research that grounds its terminology, investigative principles, and theoretical placement within postcolonial, travel, diaspora studies, the academically “displaced” realm of Greek-American studies (25), autofaction and “return narratives,” i.e. “a subgenre of travel writing that deals with the intricacies of returning to one’s ancestral homeland” (60). The Introductory Chapter, “The Promise of Return” and Chapter 1, “The Home(s) of Diaspora,” in fact, are dedicated to grounding its material both as a historic part of Greek-American letters and as an engagement with contemporary diaspora theorizations in a world of “migratory movements and easy access to communication technology and transportation” (17). In this world, the postmodern “Impossibility of Home” (35) opens up modalities of “plurality and play” (50). A second cardinal virtue is its formalistic bent that creatively combines Kindinger’s categories of investigation to derive useful theoretical tools for further study. For example, by dividing and clearly demarcating the

1 All parenthetical page numbers refer to Kindinger’s text.

five sub-generic characteristics of (69-71), as well as the different kinds of, return narratives, Kindinger shows precisely how canonical positions for relevant disciplines need to expand to acknowledge and accommodate the uniqueness and complexity of such accounts. Having said that, it is still true to say that the overwhelming majority of such diasporic narratives do share a common formula, namely: a semi-autobiographical account in English of a second-generation Greek-American author's coming to (rural) Greece in search of his/her roots, grappling with the shock of cultural misrecognition, and gaining new insights as to his/her own identity. To this purpose, each chapter examines a couple of return narratives (with the exception of Chapter 1) that share with one another particular formal characteristics and thus demand different approaches within their larger generic context.

Chapter 2, "Return Narratives: Late Arrivals and Early Departures" pivots around Daphne Athas's 1962 *Greece by Prejudice*, which chronicles her travels to Athens, Crete, Rhodes, and finally her—literally tempestuous—negotiation of a diasporic identity at her ancestral village, Hora. Kindinger first takes time to locate this subgenre within the larger realm of travel writing and map its distinctive traits, and then shows how Athas's account paradigmatically evinces those traits, and how these, in turn, cause notions of home and identity to "fluctuate" (85) instead of fixing them once and for all, as earlier researchers in the field like Theodore Saloutos have claimed (15).

The following three chapters, however, caution against generalizing about "paradigmatic" accounts. Chapter 3, "Women's Diaspora Spaces," Kindinger engages with gender studies to sketch the existence of a sub-subgenre that appropriates the modes of male diasporic narratives to convey the uniqueness of a female return perspective. Analyzing Catherine Temma Davidson's 1998 *The Priest Fainted* and Eleni N. Gage's 2004 *North of Ithaka: A Granddaughter Returns to Greece and Discovers Her Roots*, she shows how these authors shift the balance of what is traditionally considered a masculine "odyssey" of daring achievement by employing "three keys to feminizing return" (which Kindinger borrows from Anastasia Christou): "agency," i.e. viewing "migration as a collective endeavour...within the family context," the "motherland, not the fatherland" as purveyor of heritage, and finally, "family" in its extended form (96). While Davidson's narrative uses a more conventional approach with traditional Greek cooking as its kingpin metaphor, Gage employs homebuilding as a political gesture to wrestle both this activity from the realm of masculine space-making/claim-

ing and, metaphorically, writing and memory-formation from her famous father's (Nicholas Gage, author of *Eleni*) account of her family's history.

Following suit, Chapter 4 focuses on male/masculine accounts via regionalism and "popular ethnography" (127). Michael N. Kalafatas's 2003 *The Bellstone: The Greek Sponge Divers of the Aegean* and Elias Kulukundis's 1967/2003 *The Feasts of Memory* evince both expected traits of masculinized travel accounts—such as Kalafatas's fetishization of the "Greek masculinity" (134) of the old-style sponge-divers of his ancestral island, Symi—but also unexpected narrative maneuvers, like Kulukundis's endeavor to boldly write himself and his family into the local folklore of his ancestral island, Kasos (153-54). For Kindinger, "the regionalism of the return narratives discussed here is a strategy for managing the conflict between national and diaspora identities, responding to the globalized and transnational condition and character of today's world" (131).

Chapter 5, "Returning to the City: Athens" introduces yet another discipline, urban studies, to trace return narrative traits ending not with "an inclusive and polycentric diaspora space," but with the settling within an inner identity space (190). In George Sarrinikolaou's 2004 *Facing Athens: Encounters with the Modern City* and Adrianne Kalfopoulou's 2006 *Broken Greek: A Language to Belong*, contemporary Athens becomes the crazy cousin of the overly-regulated western metropolis—with a Parthenon on top. This "writing the city" for Kindinger, "is an active, creative shaping of this space. It is a process that de-naturalizes the city in that it stresses and reveals the different layers of meaning it entails" (163), in short, it is an attempt to claim its space for inhabitancy. And while Sarrinikolaou is ultimately seen as failing to experience his "*double vie*" in his childhood city, for "nostalgia gets in the way of Sarrinikolaou's intended authenticity" and marks him as a prejudiced returnee (176-77), Kalfopoulou "succeeds in belonging" to her deliberately chosen Greek culture only after much personal hardship against chaotic Greek institutions and at the cost of "submitting to a widespread xenophobic ideology of Same and Other" (183).

The final chapter, "Return Revisited: A Conclusion," wraps up the discussion by suggesting how this specific research could become applicable to wider contexts of postcolonial and other diasporic studies. Such research is valuable in contemporary discussions about a crisis-ridden of how the current, crisis-ridden Greece. Instead of being "as the *fons et origo*... of Western civilization" (qtd. in 21), Greece's need for (self-)re-evaluation

might trailblaze an inevitable re-negotiation of traditional parameters of the nation-state. All in all, Kindinger's *Homebound* is a useful book to keep handy both as reference, if one is interested in non-Jewish diaspora studies, and as a set of case studies in Greek/American and return nonfiction.

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Andrew Warnes, *American Tantalus. Horizons, Happiness and the Impossible Pursuit of US Literature and Culture*. London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2014. 198 pp. ISBN: 978-1-6235-6107-9.

American Tantalus. Horizons, Happiness and the Impossible Pursuit of US Literature and Culture presents the American canon in the context of Homer's Tantalus, who was tormented by eternal hunger and thirst while surrounded by food and water beyond his reach. Literature, argues Warnes, has a tantalizing effect: it is something we try to reach but which withdraws from us, creating a frustrated desire that permeates American writing and culture. The effect is particularly visible in the works of great writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Henry James and in cultural symbols such as the cars, guns, hotel rooms and swimming pools portrayed by, among others, Robert Penn Warren, Hunter S. Thompson, Raymond Carver, John Cheever and Stanley Elkin.

Warnes compares literature to a beautiful but empty swimming pool whose shining and untouched surface lures us to enter; as we do so, however, the surface is shattered and the illusion is gone. The pool, explains Warnes, "tries to instill in us a desire we can never act out. The yearning it would inspire repulses, necessarily, its object of attraction" (5). He states in his introduction that he focuses on US literature because "it broods so obsessively, and foregrounds so persistently, such a rich panoply of tantalizing effects" (5). Because the experience of tantalization is so universal, its prominence in US literature, and more particularly in the novel, is all the more striking, argues Warnes. *American Tantalus* is a study in desire for the things that desire itself destroys. Desirable objects like a beautiful woman or a well-made toy must remain untouched if they are to retain their beauty.

American literature is moving away from classic and resonant national